

Message Text

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SUBJ: POSSIBLE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF HARTLING CANDIDACY FOR
POST OF UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
(UNHCR)

REFS: (A) STATE 272958, (B) COPENHAGEN 6790

1. REACTION IN DANISH PRESS AND AMONG POLITICAL LEADERS TO
NEWS OF LIBERAL PARTY LEADER POUL HARTLING'S CANDIDACY FOR
THE UNHCR POST WAS ONE OF SURPRISE FOLLOWED BY SPECULATION
OVER HIS POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR AS PARTY LEADER. REPORTING AND
EDITORIAL COMMENT TEND TOWARD ASSUMPTION THAT HARTLING'S
NOMINATION BY THE UN SEC GEN AND CONFIRMATION BY THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY THEREAFTER IS ALMOST CERTAIN.

2. HARTLING, WHO HAS BEEN LEADER OF THE LIBERALS SINCE 1965,
HAS WON A REPUTATION AS A "TOUGH NUT" AND ENJOYS THE RESPECT
OF HIS FELLOW PARLIAMENTARIANS AS A HARD WORKING, CLEVER
POLITICIAN WHO HELPED THE PARTY WIN BROADENED VOTER SUPPORT
IN THE CITIES IN THE 1975 ELECTIONS. BUT FOLLOWING THE PARTY'S
CITY LOSSES IN THE FEBRUARY 1977 ELECTION, WHEN THE PARTY WAS
THROWN BACK ON ITS TRADITIONAL SUPPORT CONSISTING MAINLY OF
LARGE FARM OWNERS, FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR THE LIBERALS DARKENED

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AND HARTLING HAS RETAINED HIS PARTY CONTROL MORE AS A FUNCTION
OF HIS PRESTIGE AND SENORITY THAN BECAUSE OF BELIEF IN HIS
ABILITY TO CHART A COURSE WHICH WOULD PERMANENTLY HALT THE
DOWNWARD TREND OF THE PARTY.

3. HARTLING'S CANDIDACY, WHETHER IT IS SUCCESSFUL OR NOT, HAS
OPENED THE LISTS FOR CONTENDERS INTERESTED IN TAKING OVER HIS

POSTS AS PARTY CHAIRMAN AND LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARLIAMENTARY GROUP. IF HE IS CHOSEN FOR THE GENEVA POSITION, IT IS NOT LIKELY THAT HIS POST AS PARTY CHAIRMAN WILL BE DEFINITELY FILLED BEFORE THE PARTY'S CONGRESS IN THE FALL OF 1978. BUT HIS REPLACEMENT AS PARLIAMENTARY GROUP LEADER WILL COME UP FOR GRABS AS SOON AS IT BECOMES VACANT. HENNING CHRISTOPHERSEN, DEPUTY PARTY CHAIRMAN, WILL PRESIDE UNTIL THENEXT PARTY CONGRESS AS THE PARTY LEADER, BUT IN THE FOLKETING GROUP A NUMBER OF PROSPECTS, ALL UNDER 40 YEARS OF AGE, WILL BE VYING FOR THE POST OF GROUP LEADER.

4. THE QUESTION OF WHO TAKES OVER LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY IS INTERESTING BECAUSE THERE ARE THOSE IN THE PARTY WHO FAVOR MEASURE OF COOPERATION WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND OTHERS WHO FAVOR CLOSER LINKS TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND EVEN THE PROGRESS PARTY.

5. FINALLY, THE REMOVAL OF HARTLING FROM THE DANISH POLITICAL SCENE LEAVES THE CENTER AND RIGHT OF THE DANISH POLITICAL SPECTRUM WITHOUT A NATIONAL POLITICAL FIGURE OF RECOGNIZED STATURE AND EXPERIENCE. ALMOST BY DEFAULT, THIS ROLE IS LIKELY TO FALL, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, TO THE CONSERVATIVE LEADER POUL SCHLUTER. SCHLUTER HAS BEEN AN ASSET TO HIS PARTY WITH THE DANISH VOTERS, HELPING THE CONSERVATIVES RECOVER A RESPECTABLE POSITION IN DANISH POLITICS WITH THE SUPPORT NOW OF 11 PERCENT OF THE DANISH VOTERS. HE LACKS, HOWEVER, HARTLING'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE AND THE STATURE ATTACHING TO A CAPABLE AND RESPECTED FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER AND PRIME MINISTER. BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT HARTLING'S DEPARTURE FROM THE DANISH POLITICAL SCENE WOULD SEE THE REMOVAL OF ANOTHER OBSTACLE TO THE OFTEN-DISCUSSED MERGER OF THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTIES.

6. IT IS TOO EARLY TO PREDICT WHETHER OR NOT HARTLING'S CANDIDACY WILL BE SUCCESSFUL AND THE EFFECTS OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO TRY FOR THE POST OF UNHCR. BUT THERE WILL BE CONSEQUENCES FROM HIS DECISION AND THEIR POLITICAL EXPRESSION WILL MERIT ATTENTION IN THE COMING WEEKS. THE ONE THING SURE TO RESULT IS THAT IT WILL SEVERELY REDUCE HARTLING'S POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS IN DENMARK WHETHER SUCCESSFUL OR NOT.
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